SHORT VERSION

WOMEN, FORGIVE US!



MAN AND WOMAN IN
MARRIAGE AND CHURCH
SHORT. CLEAR. HELPFUL.
HANS-JÖRG RONSDORF

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1 Preface – Why Another Book?

In November 2020 my book *Women, Forgive Us!* (*Frauen, vergebt uns!*) was published. As expected, there was incomprehension, and outrage too, since Bible-believing brothers felt that this title was holding them hostage, as it were. Why should they ask for forgiveness when their view of women corresponds to Holy Scripture?

It is still about *two opposing positions – see also the comparison in the table further below.*

> The one position holds to the authority of the man as head over the woman. This, it says, was the creation order even before the Fall. Therefore the wife submits to her husband, is silent in the worship service, and does not teach or lead men, either inside or outside the church.
>
> The opposing position sees, from the beginning of creation, a partnership of equal standing and mutual complementing – without any difference in hierarchy. Mutual submission shapes life together. In the church, the sisters serve in all areas just as the brothers do.

Both positions are argued from the Bible. But these two worldviews are irreconcilable – that is my conclusion after studying many books, listening to lectures, and many discussions. Alas, God knows! We face a difficult theological controversy which, sadly, divides churches. I wish the debate were carried on more openly, more objectively, and more peacefully.

In this small book I advocate and explain the second position. I held and taught the first one until I was 54 years old. Through the study of Holy Scripture I had to change to the second position. I wrote a detailed book about it. For many sisters this book was a liberation they had long longed for, consciously or unconsciously, an emotional relief. Some responses moved me to tears of joy, but also of sadness. Much is still badly wrong in this matter. Responsible for this are brothers who believe they understand the Bible correctly. On the basis of their understanding they forbid women to speak in worship services, to teach, and to

take on leadership tasks. Many sisters can neither understand nor follow this. Many suffer under it, but they keep silent about it.

By now my book has reached a certain circulation, but brothers refuse to read it. It is too complicated, they say, too long, too one-sided, too biased, too feminist. That is why there is now this short and simply written book. For further and extensive material I refer you to my homepage: **www.hans-joerg-ronsdorf.de**.

Even though I am convinced before God that I am doing the right thing, I can still be wrong. But I am committed to Christ and his word. I too am bound by my conscience. This is not a purely theological or abstract controversy; *it is about half of the body of Christ, about people and their lives!*

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf, Sulzberg, November 2026

Hierarchical view of man and woman: submission, authority, head: hierarchy-oriented	**Mutual complementing without hierarchy: Galatians 3:28 – all one in Christ! Gift-oriented**
Hierarchy of the creation order; the man stands above the woman, of equal worth but not of equal rights.	Created as equals, both are bearers of God's image; they complement each other, eye to eye, with equal standing.
Genesis 3:16, "He will rule over you," is understood as a rule / command and not as a negative consequence of the Fall.	Genesis 3:16 describes the sad consequences of the Fall, which God did not want and which, sadly, have come about in history.
Eve was deceived; therefore women may not teach.	Adam sinned deliberately; Eve was led astray. The prohibition on teaching does not refer to gender, but to whether or not the teaching is in line with the gospel.
The woman is silent in the church. In her own home, too, she stays quiet toward her husband when it comes to doctrine.	Men and women prophesy together, as happened at Pentecost. Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17
Being head means the man's authority.	Head and body emphasize unity and mutual dependence.
Women may not have authority over a man.	Mutual submission, belonging, and authority, 1 Cor 7:4
Only men may lead and be elders and deacons.	Spiritual gifts are not tied to gender.
Galatians 3:28, "There is neither male nor female … you are all one in Christ," means only a spiritual equality in salvation, which, however, does not abolish the creation order.	Gal 3:28 is a description of the new creation in Christ, which is already present in the church. There, of all places, all social and gender differences fall away completely.

2 Our Foundation – What Do We Base Ourselves On?

The decisive standard, indeed the norm for all Christian action, is and remains the Bible alone. As we have it today. It is our only and reliable source. Everything must be tested by it. Traditions too. Whether ancient or more recent. Biblical truth – or better: the way we understand it – and Christian tradition are often treated as equal. Traditions can rest on a faulty understanding of Scripture. Adapting to the spirit of the age is just as misleading. Then, over time, convictions and practices pile up and harden that are out of step with the times, because they reflect the culture of past centuries or even just past decades.

They become a hindrance to the gospel.

Now people say, somewhat exaggerating: You can prove anything with the Bible. It is indeed a challenge for us, because this statement is true. How many contradictory opinions there are among Christians, all of them argued from the Bible more or less well. There is no topic in the Bible on which there are not at least two or more interpretations.

There are rules or principles that we should observe when reading the Bible and applying it to our personal life or the life of the church. I will name a few that matter for our topic and for every other topic.

To whom is the text speaking? Instructions in the Old Testament, for example to the priests, will no longer be valid for church life today. This is called a "salvation-historical" interpretation of the Bible. You pay attention to the time in which and for which statements apply. Are the statements addressed to the nation of Israel or to the New Testament church?

Is an instruction for church life unambiguous and clear, and does it occur several times? Then you can speak of a normative and timeless requirement. By contrast, difficult texts – especially when their core statement occurs

only once in the NT and many Bible-believing theologians and interpreters disagree about them – should not be made into generally binding norms.

The context of the text is decisive. Statements torn out of their context, in particular, can support anything and any doctrine. After all, we follow this rule with other literature we read as well. What counts is not only the immediate context, but ultimately the context of the whole of Holy Scripture. The question is whether the interpretation also fits into the overall biblical picture.

Just as important are the **historical context and background** of the time and place in which a text was written. You can read the Bible without such knowledge, too. It loses nothing of its divine power by that. But it is always helpful to know the historical background. After all, almost all the letters in the New Testament were written to the church in question because of an urgent occasion. We try to reconstruct that occasion.

Sometimes it is important **what a word means in the original language**. For the Hebrew and Greek of the Bible are no longer spoken today, and we speak a completely different language. Accurate translation is important. But it is always a certain interpretation, too. And depending on how a translator thinks about this or that, it will influence his translation. There are enough examples of this.

Finally, at this point, a reminder that some things must be understood **literally or word for word**, but others **figuratively or as a parable**. This may also apply, in parts, to the creation account.

3 Back to the Beginning – What God Intended

Where do we begin if we want to understand being a man and being a woman and their relationship to each other? Of course: we go to the creation account. It gives us the most important material. In the New Testament it is Paul who refers to this beginning several times when he criticizes and corrects problematic abuses in Corinth and Ephesus. He applies the creation account sometimes in general, but also in specific ways. **It is not enough to interpret this creation account only through the words of Paul.** First we, too, must go into the Garden of Eden and look at what happened there and how. Later we will come back to Paul.

Let us go to the beginning of human history. I give the text as it reads in the German Elberfelder Bible:

> Genesis 1:26-28 *And God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that moves on the earth! And God created the human being in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them: Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every animal that moves on the earth!*

On the sixth day of creation, after the animals were created first, the human being appears on the scene. The human being as man and woman. *Both sexes are named in one breath. Both are bearers of God's image, each on their own, but also together. Without distinction. Without rank. Without hierarchy. Both are to rule over creation together.* That means managing and protecting it with care. Both sexes are needed for this.

On the sixth day the world is still in order and as it should be.

There is a second account, which now zooms in on the event of the creation of the human being. These ancient texts of the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible,

are indeed mysterious and perhaps not quite easy for us to understand today. Here too the question arises what is meant literally and what figuratively. Questions remain open for us people of today. We would probably have written the account differently or in more detail. Well, we have to be content with what we have. In essence, all of it is understandable and coherent for us, and profound as well. God alone can reveal these events to us. Even though two people were present, it was not they but Moses who later wrote it down.

From the following account it is clear that Adam was created first:

> Genesis 2:18-20 *And the LORD God said: It is not good that the human being should be alone; I will make him a helper who corresponds to him. And the LORD God formed out of the ground every animal of the field and every bird of the heavens, and he brought them to the human being to see what he would call them; and whatever the human being called each living creature, that was to be its name. And the human being gave names to all the livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every animal of the field. But for Adam he found no helper who corresponded to him.*

Adam is alone. The Creator makes clear that none of the animals corresponds to him. At this moment Adam needs no working animal, not even a dog as a loyal friend. No, he needs someone who corresponds to him. A friend of the mind and of the heart. A counterpart. Could God not then perhaps have created a second Adam to end the being alone, the loneliness? But it is not a second Adam that he lacks. *What he lacks is a helper. One who corresponds to him. A human being, then. Of equal strength.* It is not a servant or an assistant that he lacks. Such a one could help too. But he would not correspond to him. He would be subordinate to him. The point is to find a counterpart, a human being like him. A personality of equal strength. With whom he can become a unity. A counterpart, a complement to every aspect of his existence.

Adam was not created first because he was to be the head or the leader. No, he was created first in order to experience and feel being alone. It is his preparation for meeting and living together with the helper who corresponds to him.

The following text, which describes the creation of the woman, is mysterious, but also telling:

> Genesis 2:21-22 *And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the human being, and he fell asleep. And he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the LORD God built the rib, which he had taken from the human being, into a woman, and he brought her to the human being.*

From the side of the sleeping Adam, God forms the first woman. A note on the translation: Adam did not "pass away" (the German Elberfelder says *entschlief*, a word that also means "passed away"), for then he would have died. And it is not a rib that is meant, but the side of his body.

What do we learn from these few words? The woman is taken from the man, not formed from the earth. So that she can correspond to him. She is taken from his side in order then, as a woman – figuratively speaking – to close that side again. She is taken from his side in order to live at his side. Not beneath him, not above him. As a complement who makes Adam complete and certainly – speaking from life experience – also makes her complete. A helper of equal standing is coming into being. It becomes a matter of the heart, a love relationship – from his side she was born.

Adam and Eve were not created at the same time, because then the mutual dependence and the being one and becoming one flesh could not have had this significance and depth.

I would have loved to be there at these moments, when God brings the woman to the man, like the bride to the bridegroom:

> Genesis 2:23-25 *And the human being said: This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman (German: Männin), for from Man she was taken. Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they will be one flesh. And they were both naked, the human being and his wife, and they were not ashamed.*

Adam is overwhelmed by this person. He cries out: At last, one like me! She is the same as he is, but the female version of him, the "wo-man" (*Männin*). He is so enraptured that in the future men will leave their homes to hold fast to their wives. Not the other way round. Here the men come to the women. To become one flesh. To become an exclusive unity, in spirit, soul, and body. A communion of hearts. A marriage partnership in a marriage covenant. As best friends, he and she. In a partnership of equal worth. Such a communion of oneness can only come about between two persons of equal worth and equal rank.

Adam recognizes this at first sight. The one standing there before him meets him eye to eye. Perhaps not in height, but certainly in her nature as a person. They only truly recognize themselves by getting to know the other.

Both meet in an unstained situation before the Fall. Their being naked without shame is something that no longer exists like this today. How long this time lasted and could be enjoyed, we do not know. I suspect that it was quite a long time.

4 Creation Order – If So, Which One?

This is the moment to take a closer look at the term *creation order*. And precisely at this point: in paradise. Where sin has not yet happened and God's plan and intention for man and woman can still be recognized.

Many sisters and brothers use this term as if it said the following: Adam was created first and therefore has the leading role. With the greater responsibility. Eve was created as a helper for him, to be there for him. From this it is concluded that the woman submits to the man. In everything – just as the New Testament says seven times. Adam, they say, is the head over Eve.

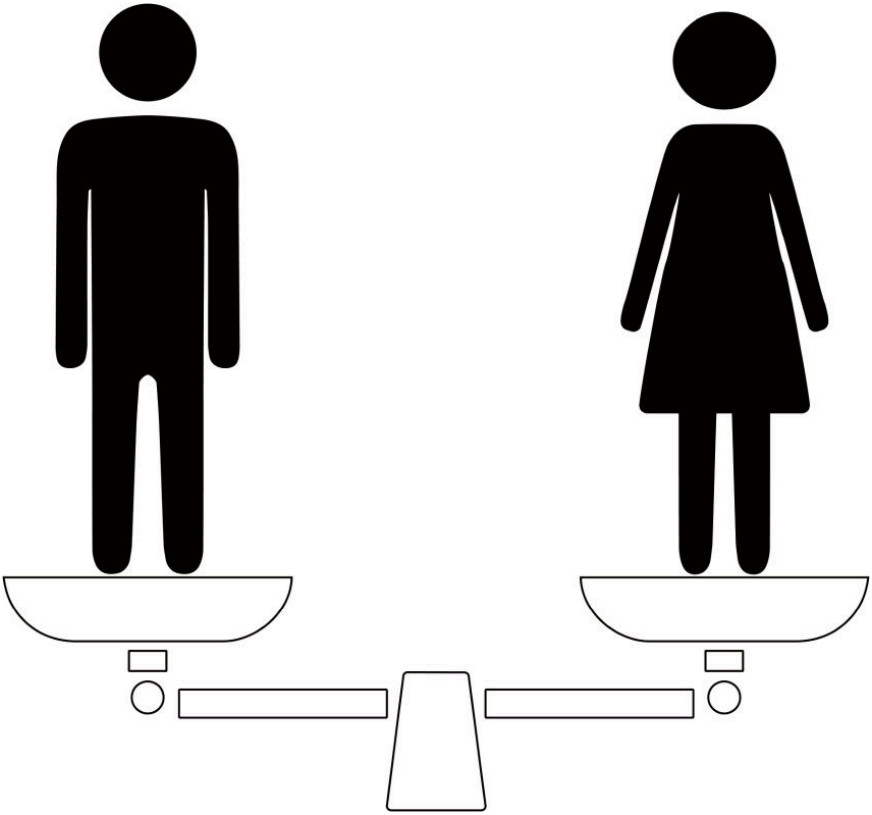
This view is widespread. This interpretation of the creation event is prompted by a few statements in the New Testament, which we will still look at.

Every reader, woman or man, should answer this question for themselves: **If you look only at the text of Genesis 1 and 2, do you find there a leading role for Adam willed by God? Or a submission of Eve?**

In these texts there is no hierarchy, no submission or leadership and authority. It is exactly the opposite, as I have described above. I had to recognize *that the submission of the woman as a creation order does not exist. So there is no God-willed hierarchical gradation or position or role.* **It is read into this text.**

That is exactly why I stand up for the creation order. Namely the one before the Fall. After that there can be no more talk of a creation **order**. From the day of the Fall onward it is a **creation DISorder. This disorder** we are not to imitate, but to resist in the light and in the power of the gospel.

In general, the term "creation order" should be used sparingly, if at all. This term tries to capture and set in concrete something that is, in the end, our interpretation.



5 What Would Come – but What God Never Wanted

Now we take a look at the account of the so-called Fall. The serpent leads Eve astray to take of the fruit, which she then also gives to Adam, who eats of it too. Let me mention beforehand: from these tragic actions it is deduced that the woman is more easily led astray, that she took the initiative here on her own authority, and that she did not follow her husband. This and similar interpretations were already given by the Jews, also by the church fathers, and up to the present day, and applied to woman as such.

Although I am concerned above all with the direct consequences of the Fall, I give the whole text that reports the individual steps:

> Genesis 3:4-6 *And the serpent said to the woman: You will certainly not die; but God knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. And the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was desirable to give insight; and she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.*

Adam had received the prohibition against eating from this tree directly from God, before Eve was there (2:17). So Eve could probably have heard it only from him. Now the talking serpent succeeds in leading her astray. Evidently in the presence of Adam, who should have intervened by now at the latest. Just as Eve becomes weak and gives in to temptation and seduction, so weak is Adam, who takes the forbidden fruit from Eve without resistance and without a word. Both act wrongly, both make a fatal mistake, and both sin. While Eve is led astray, Adam sins knowingly against God's prohibition, without being led astray or deceived.

Then God meets the human couple and the serpent. All of them are aware of what has happened. God asks each one personally about what happened. There are telling answers. God now addresses those involved in this order:

Adam – Eve – serpent – Eve – Adam.

> Genesis 3:13-15 *And the human being said: The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate. And the LORD God said to the woman: What have you done! And the woman said: The serpent deceived me, and I ate. And the LORD God said to the serpent: Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above every animal of the field! On your belly you shall crawl and eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed; he will crush your head, and you will crush his heel.*

Adam is aware of his guilt. Or perhaps not entirely, for he immediately shifts it onto Eve. It is pitiful and cowardly to make his wife responsible in this way in order to get himself off the hook.[1] And even God is indirectly accused, who had given him the woman, the very woman he had been so happy about. **He, not she, knew the commandment firsthand, and he should have said a firm no to Eve.**

Eve admits her wrongdoing. She blames neither Adam, who did not stop her, nor God, but the serpent. She distances herself from it. In this fatal situation that was the only right thing to do. Now she was shaken awake and takes her stand against this enemy. Unlike Adam, who in this conversation does not stand on his wife's side.

The serpent will be cursed forever because of this deception and brought low to the ground. Eve clearly names the one who caused the evil, and there is a magnificent promise whose full scope cannot yet be seen at that time. Her seed – you are reading correctly, the seed of the woman, not that of a man – will crush the serpent's head.

Now the consequences for Eve and then for Adam are named as well. I quote from the Zürcher Bibel (German Bible translation), which is clearer here than the Elberfelder:

> Genesis 3:16 *To the woman he said: I will give you much hardship and let your pregnancies be many; with pain you will bear children.*
>
> *You will long for your husband, and he will rule over you.*

1. Adam does not seem to have regarded Eve as a subordinate, for he would probably not have let himself be taken by surprise by such a one.

While the serpent is cursed, **no curse falls on the woman despite her transgression**. In substance these words of punishment mean this:

> *I will surely multiply (1) your toilsome work in the field and (2) your conceiving.*
>
> *With effort you will bear children.*
>
> *Your [loving] desire [will be] for your husband. But he [rules rebelliously over himself and] will want to rule over you.*

Hardship and toil are the work of farming. There Eve suffers together with Adam because of the cursed ground. The curse does not fall on one of the two or on both together, *but on the ground*. Both will suffer under it.

But there is hope. For God will multiply Eve's pregnancies. That is why there will surely be the seed that kills the serpent. Already at the beginning grace shines out, and it is the woman who, despite having been led astray, stands at the center and is promised hope. Not Adam.

God does not change the woman's anatomy so that, as a punishment, she has even more pain in childbirth. Until now she has not yet had a child. The toil does not refer to the pains of childbirth, but to farming.

Let us now come to the part that concerns her relationship to her husband. This is not a promise, but a tragic word. For countless women it ushers in a history of suffering and oppression of which men must be ashamed. **It is not God's will that the man rules over the woman; it is the sinful and fallen will of the man. That is the true meaning of this word.** *It does not describe a creation order to be kept.* It describes a disorder. For the good order of Genesis 1 and 2 has come apart at the seams here and is broken.

Whoever takes this Bible verse as grounds for the submission of the woman puts himself on the side of the serpent. The serpent was told in advance that there would be enmity between Eve and the serpent. The serpent was the aggressor, which exploited the man's rule, and still exploits it, to discriminate against the woman wherever and however it was at all possible. For from the

woman, after all, the one who would overcome the serpent was to come. So the aim was to attack and weaken the woman.

Man and woman were called to rule together. But the man would seize rule for himself and subjugate the woman as the weaker sex and make her serve him. The term *patriarchy* describes well, in general, what the sad fate of women was beyond Eden. Apart from a few exceptions.

The original relationship of mutual support and strength, of equality, of recognition among equals and of the counterpart as the closest companion has become a terribly disordered and emotionally unequal relationship, based on power and often without love. The woman will have a desire for her husband and his affection, his trust, and his protection, but he will dominate her. It is a terrifying break and upheaval.

This battle of the sexes will show itself from then on at all levels of the cultures of all peoples. It can only be healed if the evil that caused it is tackled at the root.

Finally, a look at the words of punishment to Adam, which are truly dark and which, in the end, also apply to the woman, who shares her life and her struggle for existence with him:

> Genesis 3:17-19 *And to Adam he said: Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, saying: You shall not eat of it! – cursed is the ground because of you: in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; and thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field.*
>
> *By the sweat of your face you will eat your bread, until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you will return!*

The ground is cursed not for Eve's sake but for Adam's sake. His sin seems to be greater. Eve was more of a victim and he a perpetrator. The seed of the woman, that is, a descendant of the woman who was given to him as a helper, will be one for him in the further future too: her seed (Jesus Christ) will snatch him out of the dust into life in the resurrection. One day we will also be able to talk with Adam, if by then he still wants to talk about it at all.

In the *account of the Fall*, not in the *creation accounts*, the superiority of one sex over the other is mentioned for the first time. *And this is not an inherent superiority, but one that is exercised without right, with power, strength, and force, against God's creation order.* The Creator's words to Eve, "You will long for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen 3:16), mean that in our sinful human condition the man exploits the woman's natural desire for him in order to dominate and subjugate her. The subjugation of the woman is indeed a symptom of the man's fallen nature. If the life and work of Christ mean overcoming the consequences of the Fall, then the effect on this broken relationship and on the subjugation and exploitation of the woman is obvious: he will set her free and lead her out. And so it was to come.

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf 10.4.2021
The Biblical Creation Order for Man and Woman
In the beginning: the good creation order Genesis 1–2
Equal in worth, complementary, without hierarchy
Harmony with God and with each other
Harmony with God and with each other, contaminated and destroyed by sin
After the Fall Genesis 3: creation DIS-order
Idolatry, patriarchy, subjugation, slavery, exploitation, etc.
Through Jesus' death and resurrection a new creation begins
Jesus defeats sin. Restoration begins.
The gospel changes people; in the church the consequences of sin that we are to fight disappear.
New heavens New earth Better than Eden Revelation 21 and 22
In Christ, in the new creation, gender no longer plays any role.

6 Jesus, the Christ, and Women

It is not only the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ that overcomes the consequences of the Fall. The way in which he treats women and meets them, in a Jewish as well as a Greco-Roman setting 2,000 years ago, is indeed the beginning of a new era for women. There had never been such a man before. One could get the impression that God came as a man in the flesh to show the male sex how to behave toward women.

He was the prophet who rebuked without nagging and praised without condescension. He took their questions, needs, and arguments seriously. He was completely at ease with them and never mocked their womanhood. Quite unlike what was usual in the culture of that time, where a man thanked God for not having been born a woman. When a woman was a possession one could get rid of again over trifles by a certificate of divorce. Women, like children, had a hard lot that we, in times of emancipation and equal rights in our Western world, cannot imagine. The Messiah took up the cause of the daughters of Eve. **With him there is no hint of a hierarchical submission of the woman, just as there is no prohibition on speaking, leading, or teaching in the church, in marriage, or in society.**

A woman brought the Word of life into the world. Many women followed him as the Twelve did, and served him. They followed him on his hardest road to the cross. They were at the cross when the disciples had long since fled. The risen Lord appears first to a woman. Women at the empty tomb become witnesses of the resurrection. In those cultures women were not considered worthy to be witnesses in the legal sense. Jesus simply abolishes this discrimination.

For reasons of space we will look at only three of the many women Jesus met, in order to find what has been said above in the life of Jesus.

6.1 The Samaritan Woman at Jacob's Well

Read John 4 and immerse yourself in this story. In the midday heat, when no one comes to draw water, only then does she dare to come to the well. And there Jesus is waiting for this woman. To meet her, he has taken a long detour. She had been sent away by five men, passed from one to the next and used up. To survive, she had to entrust herself to a sixth and live with her ruined reputation. At that time a man did not speak with a woman in public, least of all a Jew with a Samaritan woman. But Jesus did! He reveals himself to this woman as the Messiah. He had never done that before. He talks with her about the water of life and about worship for longer than with anyone else about a theological topic. He takes time. He wins her heart. She was worth it to him, the man from Nazareth, *the man of Sychar*.

After this encounter with God, set free from all fear and shame, she evangelizes her whole village. Many believe. Jesus and the disciples stay two more days.

Later these believers in Samaria will gather in house churches. And she, the woman, will surely speak in these gatherings about him, the man of Sychar, about her Messiah and her unique encounter with him. She will pass on what he told her about worship. For the assembled church is the place where the Father is worshiped. This woman, too, will certainly raise her voice in the church to worship. For why else would he have explained worship to her of all people, a woman?

This story alone reduces any command of silence to absurdity.

6.2 At the Feet of Jesus – Martha and Mary

Quite well known is the story (Luke 10:38-42) in which Martha complains to Jesus that her sister Mary is not helping her while she prepares the meal for Jesus and his disciples. Mary prefers to sit with the disciples at the feet of Jesus

in order to learn from him. Jesus defends Mary and says that this is even necessary and that she has chosen the good part, which would not be taken from her. What does this mean? Women, too, are to learn in the kingdom of God, just as men do. Practically no women were in the rabbinic schools. Jesus does it differently. Man and woman are equally able to learn and equally able to teach. Here too Jesus breaks a convention of his time, one that has long since ceased to exist among us. Paul later writes to Timothy (2 Tim 2:2) that what he has heard in the presence of many witnesses he is to entrust to *people – women and men* – who will be able to teach others. That fits this situation well: Jesus entrusts his teachings to such people, women disciples and men disciples, who thereby become able to teach others later. **This obviously contradicts a general prohibition on teaching for women.**

In the relationship with Jesus, gender no longer plays a role. He did not show partiality (Matt 22:16). This does not mean that the sexes are neutralized, but that both are honored by Jesus equally and without distinction: **Whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister!** (Mark 3:33-35)

6.3 Mary Magdalene, the Apostle to the Apostles

This is what the church father Hippolytus of Rome called Mary Magdalene in the 3rd century. Why? She was the first one Jesus met after his resurrection. Perhaps she loved him more than all the others. Jesus had freed her from the slavery and misery of demonic possession. From then on she had followed him, with other women who had been healed by him (Luke 8:2-3). He knew her heart. And only she, a woman, was to experience this unique moment in the garden. And evidently only she was to be granted the privilege of hearing words from Jesus that surpass anything people have ever heard:

> *But go to my brothers and say to them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God* (John 20:17).

So she becomes the messenger, the apostle for the disciples. A title of honor that suits her, even if it is not official. This message is not entrusted to a man,

not to one of the Twelve. It is entrusted to a woman, as a faithful witness. **Will she not also have told of this encounter again and again in the gatherings?**

7 The Bride Church and the Ministry of Women

All believers, all who confess Jesus, men and women alike, are together the bride of the Lamb.

In the creation account it is unmistakable how Adam and Eve, as God intended, do not rule over each other, but fulfill God's creation mandate with each other and side by side. There are no privileges whatsoever of the one over the other, and no restrictions on either sex. This is what a marriage according to God's plan looks like; this is, in principle, how both sexes are to relate to each other in all areas of life.

The Fall has broken this picture lastingly: the balance is destroyed; the man now wants – apart from exceptions, of course – to rule over the woman. Only through sin is the woman placed under him. Indeed, subjugated and pushed into the background. Public life is reserved for the man. The woman, in turn, will develop her own strategies to make the best of her situation.

But how is it in the church, how in the kingdom of God? Is this sinful pattern of inequality and tension and one-sided submission to be continued there? In the letters of Paul and Peter there are words that can be understood this way if one wants to understand them this way. But let us first take a look at Paul.

7.1 Paul and His Women Coworkers

Two, perhaps three Bible texts make Paul appear, if they are understood superficially, as a **woman-hater**. If you look closely, the opposite is rather the case. Like Jesus, his absolute model, he treats women in a revolutionary way, namely as having the same rights as men. He was a **friend of women**. He indeed makes no distinctions. The matter-of-factness with which he writes about the sisters in the Lord is striking. The work of the tireless apostle and missionary Paul was surrounded by and networked with many women. They were involved

in his mission and, like links in a chain, indispensable coworkers. Women were not helpers in the second row; they stood out for their faithfulness and served the word as Paul did. We could list a great many such women; I will limit myself to three. In Romans 16, 29 persons are named; at least 10 of them are women whose ministry and dedication Paul honors, more than that of the men. That is where we begin.

7.1.1 Phoebe – Deacon, Leader, and Letter Carrier

The greetings in Romans 16 begin with Phoebe. For good reason. She is the one who has the trust and the means to carry what is perhaps Paul's most important letter to Rome. It was customary for the letter carrier not only to read the letter aloud, but also to answer questions about it. Instructed personally by Paul and introduced to this letter, which he wrote in Corinth, Phoebe was able to fulfill this task. She visited the various house churches in Rome to read the letter aloud and to explain it where there were questions.

She herself was a servant, a *deacon* of the house church in Cenchreae, the eastern port of Corinth. More than that, she was perhaps the leader of this church. According to German translations, Paul calls her a *Beistand, Hilfe oder Stütze* (a helper, aid, or support). It actually means *one who presides* (Greek: *prostatis*) and points to a *leading position, for example in this house church*. It is hard to imagine that Paul gives this task to Phoebe, who has a responsible position in the house church in Cenchreae, but forbids women in general to speak, teach, and lead in the church.

On the other hand, we do not want to read too much into these verses, but neither is it good to interpret them as if she had merely performed a simple postal service.

7.1.2 A Model Married Couple: Prisca and Aquila

The *married couple Prisca and Aquila*, the couple named most often, are perhaps Paul's longest-standing and most trusted coworkers in his missionary work.

Although with married couples the husband was always named first, the New Testament names Prisca, the wife, first four times (out of six mentions). Why? Because she went ahead and led in the ministry. Perhaps because she was more gifted than her husband. And yet the two worked together as team partners, of equal worth and equal rank, in unity. Each knew the strengths and weaknesses of the other. As a woman, Prisca was also strategically important, because women were mostly reached with the gospel by women, not by men. Both, with Prisca in front, instructed Apollos (Acts 18:26). Taught by Paul himself, trained through questions and answers during many hours of making tents together, both were equipped to instruct others.

Here Prisca, a woman, deserves special mention. Her husband stood behind her in support, in the second row, but without any hierarchy being able to arise from this. It is inconceivable that Paul would have issued a general prohibition on teaching for women when she was instructing Apollos and surely many others too. This couple is a model for all married couples.

7.1.3 Junia – the Outstanding Apostle

Another missionary couple is singled out by Paul: Andronicus and Junia. Both are called apostles (Rom 16:7). The earliest interpreters of the New Testament, the church fathers, speak of Junia with high esteem. John Chrysostom (AD 344-407) writes about Junia: "To be an apostle is something great. But to be outstanding among the apostles – consider what great praise that is. How great must the wisdom of this woman have been, that she was found worthy of the title apostle."

The male-dominated world of churches and congregations finds it hard to accept that a woman is called an apostle by the apostle Paul. That is why there are translations that turn Junia into a Junias, that is, a man's name. What must not be, cannot be. But research has by now repeatedly confirmed that it is a woman's name.

In what sense the two were apostles remains open. Perhaps they had been sent out by a church. Perhaps they carried out an apostolic ministry of planting churches. Or they were apostles in the sense that they belonged to those who had seen the risen Lord and were now working for the kingdom of God outside Palestine.

Here too I repeat myself: **A prohibition on speaking, teaching, and leading for women can hardly be kept by a woman apostle.** That both of them were at times in prison with Paul allows the conclusion that both of them proclaimed the gospel, probably in public as well.

8 Is There a Command of Silence for Sisters?

When you look at these three women and others around Paul, you will not come up with the idea that women had to be silent in the assembled house church, that is, in what we today call the worship service. Nor is there any other indication in the New Testament that it was meant to be so or was practiced so. **We would not even come up with the idea that such a thing could exist.**

Except for one short passage, which one has to understand this way. It is this text in 1 Cor 14:34-35:

> *Let the women be silent in the assemblies, for it is not permitted for them to speak, but they are to be subordinate, as the law also says.*
>
> *But if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the assembly.*

This could be understood as a direct and unambiguous command of the Lord. But there are well-founded doubts about it. Not because of an emancipatory or feminist attitude, but grounded in Scripture itself.

In chapter 11:5 Paul speaks of women who pray and prophesy (in agreement with *Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17*). Where do they do this? Some say in the assembly, others say only outside the assembly, as these verses 34-35 in chapter 14 seem to confirm. But in Paul, praying and prophesying take place **above all** when the church comes together. *That is how he describes it in chapter 14. There it is self-evident for Paul that women take part.* He expresses this several times.

- Verse 5: I would like *all* of you to speak in tongues, but even more that you prophesy!
- Verse 12: seek that *you (all)* may abound for the building up of the assembly.
- Verse 23: If then *the whole assembly* comes together in one place and *all* speak in tongues …

- Verse 26: What then, brothers? When *you* come together, *each one of you* has a psalm, has a *teaching*, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation; let all things be done for building up.

By brothers (Greek: *adelphoi*) the siblings are meant, that is, brothers **and** sisters, as in many other verses which we cannot restrict to men only (the word occurs 27 times in 1 Corinthians, and almost always brothers **and** sisters are meant).

- Verse 31: For you can *all* prophesy *one after another*, so that all may learn and all may be encouraged.

For every Christian for whom the Bible is God's word, contradictions within the biblical text are ruled out. Yet verses 34-35 strike most readers as a foreign body in the text. In the first place this has nothing to do with biblical criticism or a wrong attitude, but with common sense, which rightly perceives a contradiction here.

How can we resolve this contradiction? *In view of these verses, where women pray and prophesy and all are also called upon to do so, and also in view of the description of women's ministries in Paul, it is impossible that a universal and timeless command of silence can be meant.* In other words: another explanation of this text is needed, one that yields a plausible and not a contradictory meaning. There are a great many interpretations, or rather attempts at an explanation, since most interpreters have recognized the contradiction. I will name a few of them here, in order then to propose a different solution.

8.1 Evaluating Prophecies

If women in Corinth are to ask their husbands at home, this means that they had questions and were probably not well instructed. They lacked knowledge. So either they interrupted too often with questions at the church gatherings, or they made contributions that were not wise, and in a manner that was the opposite of what Paul here calls *being subordinate*. In this way they caused disturbance,

and disorder arose that does not befit the God of peace. *So the issue would not be whether they said something, but how and what they said.*

It could also mean that the women were excluded from evaluating the prophetic statements (v. 29) of their husbands or of all the men, since in the culture of that time it was a disgrace for wives to expose their husbands by public criticism.

8.2 Verses 34 and 35 a Quotation?

It is possible that Paul is quoting some Corinthians here in order to refute them. Then these would not be Paul's words. It is generally recognized that in 1 Corinthians Paul several times quotes, either freely or word for word, from a letter, in the following places: 6:12-13; 7:1; 8:1, 4; 10:23; 15:12. Not every quotation is always marked as such; whether something is a quotation is deduced from the context. He had been informed, orally or by a letter, that there were men demanding such a command of silence for women in Corinth. *Such demands for silence existed in the Greek and Roman culture of that time.*

The appeal to the law is strange, because a command of silence, just like a command of submission, does not exist in the law of Moses. *We find nothing about the submission and silence of women in the Old Testament, not even in the creation account.* Paul in particular works out clearly that the law of Moses is no longer the rule of life for Christians, and certainly not the standard for the shape of the worship service. Therefore what may be meant here is a Jewish, or Greek, or Roman interpretation or rule to which such people appealed, but not the divine law, nor the law of Christ. This supports the view that we have a quotation here.

If it is a quotation, then Paul reacts clearly in verse 36, indeed indignantly, to this untenable demand. In German and in the Bible translations this is not apparent. His reaction can be rendered like this: "What?" Or "Nonsense!" Or "By no means" are women to be silent in the assembly. *It would be an intense interjection and contradiction by Paul.*

8.3 Verses 34 and 35 a Later Insertion?

The verses sound strange and have content that is not found elsewhere in Paul. By now there are clear indications from the ancient textual witnesses that these verses are an insertion by copyists.

If we had only internal doubts, that is, contradictory or hard-to-understand statements, we would still have to wait for clarification. But now there are findings in the manuscript witnesses that seem to confirm this.

A first well-founded suspicion is raised by the fact that in manuscripts these two verses appear several times in different places. Once where they usually stand in our Bibles, that is, after verse 33. **But in others they stand after verse 40.** The simplest explanation is this: someone wrote them in the margin of a codex. The next copyist moved this marginal note into the main text, deciding at which point. Had it always been the same point, nothing would have been noticed.

This initial suspicion is confirmed by a discovery in the important **Codex Vaticanus** from the 4th century. It is one of the most important large manuscripts of the New Testament. In this text these verses, and a few others, are indeed marked as a later insertion.

The Codex Fuldensis from the 6th century also has both readings, and the one that does **not** have verses 34 and 35 is understood as a correction.

So the exemplars of both codices (manuscripts) did not have these verses!

Then they do not come from Paul either. Not having been written by Paul, the passage is also not inspired and simply wrong. Like the false seed that was sown among the good and is still growing today. If you consider the effects of these two verses, what they have done to women, and how many tears and quarrels and separations these words have brought, you can well understand why this thesis is suspected.

Without these verses the last section of 1 Corinthians 14 becomes coherent again and yields a clear line of thought.

Women who take the command of silence literally would not be allowed to join in singing praise (14:15) or to say the Amen (14:16) either. But they do this even where the command of silence is understood this way. That is inconsistent and shows how even Paul would contradict himself *with this interpretation*. That may have been the case in the Jewish synagogue, but not in the assemblies of the risen Lord.

I find it tragic that men have chosen this interpretation of this word of Paul, without regard for the context of the chapter, the letter, and the New Testament, *to the disadvantage of women*, and have thereby bound all women to silence. *In doing so they rob the gatherings of much spiritual richness, if not even of the voice of the Lord.* For the sisters, too, have the Spirit of God and the gifts of the Spirit. Can it be that in the most important gathering half of the body of Christ has to be silent? Or that the Spirit works only through men?

I was taught always to compare Scripture with Scripture and to look for parallel texts that support and confirm an interpretation. Is there another text that contains, indirectly presupposes, or commands a command of silence for women? No.

All in all, there are only statements that directly or indirectly show and suggest that women took part. *The command of silence is a single text. Unusual, moreover, so that it either points to speaking that is inappropriate and is therefore forbidden, or it is not from Paul, being an unauthorized insertion or a quotation. Then it would not be an apostolic instruction, but exactly the opposite.*

How does anyone come to decide, on such thin evidence, against the sisters and to forbid them for a lifetime to speak in the most important gathering of Christians? And at the same time to react in an extremely emotional and agitated way when this subject is raised with them? May I sincerely ask the men who insist on it to put themselves in the women's position for once? That is, to accept such a far-reaching, strict as well as inexplicable, even contradictory

order as a command of the Lord on the basis of only two sentences? The Lord's commands are understandable and not strange and questionable; they serve to build up and for our good, but not to devalue one sex.

I cannot avoid asking the question: **Who has the greatest interest in the daughters of Eve being silent and having their mouths forbidden? It is the ancient serpent, which already attacked the woman in the garden. But God takes the side of the woman; her seed will crush the serpent's head.**

Those who advocate the participation of the sisters in the worship service through a spoken contribution or a song, through a sermon or a testimony, are sometimes accused of feminism or worldliness. To this I must reply: in the very likely case that these two verses reproduce a worldly law that seeks to exclude women from public life and thus discriminates against them, who then is worldly in this question?

If women are still silent in the assemblies today because of a worldly command from the first or second century, which found its way into the Bible by deception, then that is a tragic scandal!

9 Is There a Prohibition on Teaching for Sisters?

In view of how Paul and Jesus treated women, we would not come up with the idea that women may not teach. They belong to those who can bring a teaching in the worship service (1 Cor 14:26), who teach as Prisca taught Apollos (Acts 18:26), or who are to be teachers of what is good (Titus 2:3). Like men, they belong to the *people* who pass on what they have learned by teaching others in turn (2 Tim 2:2). Nor is the spiritual gift of teaching limited to men (Rom 12:7).

Jesus wants women to teach just as men do: (Matt 28:19-20) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.**

But as with the prohibition on speaking, there is only **one single** passage of Scripture that is understood to mean exactly that women should not teach and should not lead or exercise authority either. There are different views on whether these verses are only about the worship service or include all areas of life. A command of silence in the worship service would have settled most of this: whoever may not speak cannot teach there either.

The passage in question in 1 Timothy refers to a historical and problematic situation in Ephesus that we do not know exactly. We have only this letter, that is, one side of the story. We should take this into account before we draw conclusions from not knowing or from silence and present them as binding commands for all time. In this sense the letter was not written to us, but for us. The recipients, on the other hand, understood everything in their situation. One would have to consider the whole paragraph from verse 8 to 15; we will limit ourselves to verses 11-14. At the end of this chapter there follows a rendering of the whole passage according to its sense.

[1 Tim 2:11-14] *Let a woman learn in quietness in all submission. But I do not permit a woman to teach, nor to rule over the man, but to be quiet, for Adam was formed*

first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and fell into transgression.

The sentence that a woman should learn is the only one in this passage in the imperative, and revolutionary at that. Education was not accessible to most women, nor was it wanted. Here lies a key to these instructions. The woman – and what can be meant here is only a particular woman ("a" woman) or a group of women – is to learn with a receptive attitude. So that she does not teach with half-knowledge or with the false teachings mentioned several times in 1 Timothy, in a domineering attitude, or presume to lecture her husband.

The word rule here means neither spiritual leadership nor teaching authority. The Greek word occurs only once in the New Testament and meant something negative in the everyday language of the time. There are other words that Paul uses for authority or power. So in the letter to Timothy it describes a derailment, a negative and threatening, even abusive, behavior. He would forbid the same to men. Here, however, it was concretely a problem with women. **Teaching and ruling** is not an intended combination but a wrong one, and we do not even know exactly what may be meant by it. For what exactly the problem addressed was, we can only try to reconstruct from these words. **The authority to teach comes from teaching sound doctrine, from a gift of teaching, and from the approval and support of the church and its leadership.**

Translated more precisely, it reads: *I am not now permitting a woman* … So this text addresses a local situation that could change for the better once the woman had done her homework. Urging precisely these corrections is the reason for the whole letter, which addresses several specific persons and false teachings (1 Tim 1:3-6; 1:19-20; 4:1-10; 5:13-16; 6:3-10; 6:20-21).

Paul now cites the story of Adam and Eve in brief. As a comparison and an example. Not to describe a precedence of Adam. Or a greater weakness or temptability of Eve, and thus of all women, as grounds for a prohibition on teaching. The fact that Adam was created first does not establish his leading role and thus a creation order before the Fall; he simply states the actual order. In other

words: Paul does not say women may not teach because Adam was created first. The little word "for" is in the original text *sometimes, but not always,* the beginning of a reason; as in other places, it is simply the beginning of a comparison and an image from the Old Testament.

Only the recipients knew exactly why Paul cites Adam and Eve in this context. We consider the following explanations possible and understandable, without drawing far-reaching conclusions from them:

In the Gnostic teachings that were circulating in Ephesus, the biblical creation account was mixed with pagan elements, especially Gnosis (6:20). These exalted Eve as the first one and as the female power that breathed the soul into Adam. Perhaps this mention, with its emphasis on the order, served as a correction. The cult of Artemis, which dominated city life in Ephesus, will have played a role with its myths, teachings, and practices. For the church this was a threat. It is not mentioned here, but in Acts 19 you get a vivid impression of it. Paul knew the dangers exactly; he had been in Ephesus long enough.

Eve was created not only after Adam, but out of him and for him, to be a helpful partner of equal standing who shared everything with him. When the serpent approaches her, she is deceived because she apparently wanted to deal with this situation alone. In this existential danger she does not turn to her partner to face this challenge together. So the women in Ephesus, and ultimately all women, are not to override their partners, but to act together with them and, if necessary, learn from them.

Adam received the commandment about the forbidden fruit before Eve was there. In this sense Eve had to hear it from her husband. Eve was perhaps deceived because she had not listened well enough. That was a warning to some women in Ephesus to learn and to be grounded in the teaching of the gospel and of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Only then would they be able to teach, men as well.** Adam was not deceived; he knew the commandment firsthand, directly from God, and sinned with full knowledge. His sin, as we saw in Genesis, was not being led astray, but sinning with open eyes, that is, with full knowledge and consent.

Since Paul's letter aims at combating false teaching (from 1:3 on), why is 2:12 read as a prohibition of right teaching by women and not as a prohibition of false teaching by women?

Teaching what is false in an inappropriate way was a concrete problem of one woman, or of several, in Ephesus. But it is clear that men should not do exactly that either. All who have learned the truth are to teach others with the attitude of a servant.

There follows an *explanatory rendering* of 1 Tim 2:8-15. This is how I would render this difficult text in brief:

Dear Timothy, in order to get a grip on the problems in Ephesus with some men and some women and their false teachings, the following must happen: the men are to start praying. Everywhere they meet. In public too. Instead of quarreling about myths and false teachings. Anger and strife hinder prayer. Praying together leads to a quiet and peaceful life and life together. With raised, open, and receiving hands that are clean of quarreling and violence, they are to worship our Savior God together and intercede for all people before God's throne.

Of course the women are to pray too, just like the men. In doing so it is important that the women – I mean above all the rich women – show themselves modest wherever they appear and are seen. Their adornment, which draws the attention of the men and also of the women to themselves, in order to outdo one another, is not to consist of elaborate and conspicuous hairstyles, or of gold and pearl jewelry and expensive and extravagant clothing. Women who follow the Messiah have no need to put themselves on show like that or to exercise influence and dominance in this way. There is an adornment and an influence that is worth more, which is even respected by all people: good works.

The woman is to learn what the truth of the gospel is. Willing to learn, attentive, and eager to know. In her own home. Especially some of these women I do not now permit to spread all these false myths and teachings any further. They are not to set themselves above their husbands and dominate and lecture them high-handedly. They are to listen when their husbands, or those of the

church, explain sound doctrine to them. For they need it, since they lack knowledge, and this ignorance does great harm when they spread myths in the households.

The creation of Adam and Eve is exactly the right example of this. Adam was created first, and he was the one who was to instruct Eve. He was not deceived. But Eve was deceived and misled. In the temptation she did not turn to her partner. If the women are not willing to learn, they will be deceived like Eve and become a snare to others. If some women in Ephesus do not learn from their husbands, exactly the same will happen. Only when they have learned may they also teach others, men too.

And these women should know that they will be kept safe in childbearing. Despite Eve's being led astray and the great risks of giving birth. Only God, our Savior, saves, but not the man-made protective goddess of Ephesus, Artemis. That is why they are to concentrate on faith and love and holiness. Together as a married couple who, like Adam and Eve, are one flesh. The women are not to be afraid of having children. No one may forbid them to marry. The men are to control themselves sexually and bear in mind that too many pregnancies are a danger to their wives.

10 The Priesthood of All Believers

In the garden of paradise, Adam and Eve, in innocence before the Fall, are *kings* who rule and *priests* who live in God's presence. With him and for him. *Working* and *keeping* are words that were later used for the service of the priests (Genesis 2:15).

The garden of paradise in Eden is a picture of the Most Holy Place in the temple. The new and better Eden, that is, the new earth, will be a global, worldwide Most Holy Place. The whole earth will be a garden of paradise. That is why the new Jerusalem, a picture of the new creation, has the shape of a huge cube (Rev 21). This corresponds to the same shape as the Most Holy Place in the temple. The new earth, populated by women and men, by kings and queens, by priests and priestesses.

Will there be a hierarchy there in the relationship between man and woman? Some say no, because it is the new creation. Hierarchy, they say, applies only to the old and fallen creation. But in the church the new creation has already begun. There this future already becomes visible now in the way we behave toward one another. Why then should there still be a hierarchy in the church that God does not want? **In the church of Jesus, only mutual and voluntary submission counts.**

The Reformation brought this truth of the priesthood of all believers back to light. In church practice, however, it has had little or no effect. No one, not even the Catholic Church, doubts the priesthood of all believers. The question is what this truth means in practice for church life. That every believer, woman and man, is a priest should already be reason enough for both sexes to be able to have the same role or ministries in the worship service. Far from it. On the one hand, the priesthood of all believers is lived personally. Prayer and fellowship with God are a personal, individual blessing. The model of the priesthood and of the sacrificial service connected with it comes from the Old Testament, where the priest led the worship and carried out the sacrifices. **That is why it is**

natural, when thinking of the priesthood of all believers, to think also of the gathering of believers who together enter the heavenly sanctuary as worshipers. And together, at the Lord's Table, the spiritual altar, offer spiritual sacrifices of praise. Can there, may there, be differences between the sexes there? **The word of God does not make these differences in the New Covenant. Then we should not make them either.**

Only men were priests in the Old Covenant. But not every man could be a priest or a Levite. You had to be born a Levite, and as a priest you had to come from Aaron's family. And in addition you had to be ritually clean and have no physical defects.

Incidentally, the work of the priest was violent and strenuous, like that of a butcher. Cutting up the animals in the heat of the Near East was sweaty work, better done by men, who are simply stronger on average than women. This kind of priestly work in worship no longer exists today.

We should also note that the development of a special (male) Levitical priesthood is itself a sign of Israel's failure, since it arises only after the people had been led into idolatry by the golden calf (Exod 32), against which only the Levites rose up (vv. 26-29). **God's first intention for his people was that they should all be a "kingdom of priests" (Exod 19:6), a vision that is now being realized in and through Christ (Rev 1:6; Heb 13:15). God's goal has been reached: women and men are now priests of God.**

Our life – not only that of men, but of men and women – is to be a living sacrifice to God; the whole of life is a priestly service (Rom 12:1-2).

11 May Sisters Be Elders?

If there is no general command of silence and no general prohibition on teaching for the sisters, may they then be elders?

Some churches have official elders, and every church member knows who is one. There are churches that speak only of a ministry of elders, which makes no fundamental difference when it comes to what their activities consist of: teaching, protecting and leading the flock, caring, overseeing, providing pastoral care.

Everyone is a child of their time, unless they have lived completely isolated. Times change, sometimes for the better. What am I trying to say? That the letters of the New Testament were written at a time when patriarchy was the basic order of society. The woman was considered less capable and inferior to the man, and consequently she was not present in public life. Women had no right to vote. It is precisely this discrimination, whether on a small or a large scale, that came about through the Fall.

We have seen **that Jesus and Paul did not adapt to the spirit of the age, but gave women the dignity they have as bearers of God's image.** Nevertheless, as far as we know, the apostles and their coworkers probably appointed only male elders. That is only too understandable. **They had to begin with what was there, with where people lived in their culture, and not where one would have liked them to be.** But that does not mean that it must, or should, always remain so. Phoebe from Corinth (Rom 16:1) is only one exception that was already possible in Paul's time. Leadership as such is not a men's matter. There are even large-scale studies showing that women are the better leaders. I cannot judge that, but it makes clear in principle that there are no mental or intellectual limitations whatsoever in women.

But what does the New Testament say? There is an important pointer on this question in 1 Timothy 3:1 that is hardly ever noticed:

> *The saying is trustworthy: If* anyone *aspires to the ministry of an overseer, he desires a noble work.*

This verse comes directly after the passage about a woman's wrong teaching and ruling. **This verse does not begin a new section, but is the conclusion of 2:8-15.** Sections, verse numbers, and headings did not exist in the original writings. *Verse 1 of chapter 3 refers to the woman or the women in 2:11-15*. It does not say: if a man aspires to such a ministry. It can just as well mean: if a woman or women aspire to such a ministry. **The word "anyone" is neutral, neither masculine nor feminine.**

Paul wanted the women first to learn themselves before they teach others. And, even when they had learned, not to seize a teaching competence high-handedly. Then they could enter this ministry of overseer or elder, or be called to it. With the necessary maturity and competence this ministry was open to them (not only when there were no men available). Paul opens the door for women here, and he had long known such women as his coworkers.

Then follow the necessary qualifications. From them it can be seen that men too, of course, are to carry out this ministry. The men are to have only one wife. For women who wanted to be elders the same applied**. The pronouns are neutral from the beginning of the list. "Husband of one wife" was at that time an idiom for marital faithfulness, also monogamy, but not for the requirement that only men could be elders.**

At that time men, as the *pater familias*, presided over the household. Being good at this was one of the qualifications, which could apply to women in the same way (1 Tim 5:14 – managing the household). In his letters Paul requires all these qualities of women too. Neither these qualifications nor the ministry of overseer as such are purely a men's matter.

Women too may aspire to this noble work!

There is less discussion about the ministry of deacon: v. 11 shows that women too are to be deacons.

To exclude women from church leadership means harming oneself (Eph 5:29). Sadly, the exclusion of the sisters from leadership circles and "brothers' meetings" (*Brüderstunden*) has also led to men with little or no qualification often coming into the leadership of churches. The damage this has caused need not be described here.

The Holy Spirit gives men and women the gift of leading and presiding (1 Cor 12:28; Rom 12:8). Let us start looking out for such women, encouraging them, and inviting them into such ministries. A first, simple step would be to hold leadership meetings together with the wives of the male leaders.

If Peter and Paul are of the opinion that the leadership of the church is reserved for men alone, why then are their teachings on the gifts of leadership addressed to both men and women, without making this restriction clear? The teachings on the spiritual gifts show that, with regard to church leadership in the New Covenant, there is no difference between men and women.

Nor is this contradicted by the fact that Jesus chose twelve apostles as the founding apostles of his new movement. Yes, they were all Jewish, free, and male. **But he appointed them in a time of transition, before the inauguration of the New Covenant. Following the pattern of the twelve patriarchs, they symbolized the restoration of the people of God as followers of Jesus.**

It is undisputed that after Pentecost, in the age of the Spirit, the church leaders who followed could be Gentiles or slaves. That the Twelve were Jewish and free is no argument against such leaders. Likewise, the maleness of the twelve apostles is no argument against later leaders being female.

If it had been important to the apostles that women had no place in the ministry of leadership, they would have said so. But nowhere is an exclusion of women even hinted at.

Finally, a word on the objection that all this is leveling and abolishes the differences between man and woman given in creation. I firmly disagree, for Adam was not given a second Adam at his side, but an Eve. She has what he does not

have. Together they complement each other, without any hierarchical or positional subordination or superiority.

The differences between man and woman are unmistakable and cannot be overlooked. The word egalitarian, that is, equality of man and woman, is not very helpful in this discussion. At this point the issue is not what makes being a man different from being a woman, and vice versa, but ruling out an unbiblical difference in rank by which the work of women in the church is restricted or even prevented. **To restrict the work of women means, in the end, to resist the Holy Spirit.**

12 Head Covering – Still Today?

The so-called *head covering* occurs in the New Testament only in *1 Corinthians 11:2-16*. Evidently this was a controversial topic in Corinth. Here too we do not know the background among the recipients of the letter. The Corinthians will have understood every sentence Paul writes about it. My attempt at an explanation is one of many. For us it remains a difficult text. To understand this, I ask you, dear sister, if you cover your head, to make clear to yourself for once the reason for it from this passage. **Why, where, and when do you cover your head (if this applies to you)?**

The aim here is to apply this text of Paul, which was written not to us but for us, and to answer the question: is it binding today, and if so, how?

This passage is often explained like this: the man, or husband, is the head of the woman and has the leading role given in creation. The woman, or wife, expresses this publicly when praying and prophesying by having something on her head, a head covering (today: headscarf, hat, veil, etc.). What kind of garment is meant for the covering remains open. Probably the long end of the outer garment was thrown around and over the head when needed.

The first question is where covering is required: in the worship service or outside it? The issue is **where** sisters pray and prophesy. In an earlier chapter (chapter 8) I said that it must refer to the worship service, that is, the place where men and women pray and prophesy together.

It is usually assumed that Paul urges the women to cover themselves because they, or some of them, no longer wanted to. That may be so. On the basis of verse 10, I would rather see it the other way round: **there were men who demanded that women take off their head coverings.** Either as a new Christian freedom or out of immoral motives, namely to be able to see the women of the church and their hair in a way that was otherwise not, or hardly, possible. **That is why Paul encourages the women and grants all women**

the right (verse 10) to cover themselves. However, it is not absolutely necessary to answer this question of who was demanding what.

In addition, one should know what role the head covering played in Greek Corinth and in the Roman Empire at that time. *Married women always wore a head covering in public, not only in the worship service.* It belonged to their dignity as married women who were not available to other men. In contrast to prostitutes and also female slaves, who wore no head covering. The latter were forbidden to do so. Covering, probably a veil-like wrap, was a protection on the one hand and a sign of loyalty toward the husband on the other. It was a social dignity that was expressed by this covering. **The question of submission was not relevant with regard to the head covering. The women were submissive in this ancient culture anyway. A head covering was not a sign of submission, but of belonging, namely to her husband. Submission is not the subject of this Corinthian text.** What was good social custom in Corinth, and almost everywhere at that time, still is in Islamic countries today, but no longer among us in the West. *Symbols such as a head covering only make sense where society and its culture know what they mean.*

In verse 10 Paul makes a clear statement to settle the matter of head covering – **note that the original text says nothing about having a sign of authority or power on the head** (namely a head covering). Correctly translated, it says:

> **Therefore the woman ought to have authority over her head because of the angels.**

This verse shows that the demand had possibly been raised that a head covering was no longer needed, for Paul now says: *The woman may decide for herself whether she wears a head covering. And that means all the women of the church. Also those who were unmarried, freedwomen, female slaves, and prostitutes who had come to faith. Paul gives every woman the dignity of covering herself in the church or in the worship service. Whoever is counted worthy of judging angels one day (1 Cor 6:3) may certainly decide this matter for herself.*

In this way Paul also answers the question we ask in the 21st century when this text is read: every woman decides for herself whether it is fitting for her to cover herself. Not her husband, nor the men of a church leadership. Today a head covering in the worship service tends to cause irritation among outsiders. That would be exactly the opposite of what it brought about in Corinth. A head covering today is, in the truest sense of the word, out of step with the times.

In contrast to cultural and time-bound adaptations, the following remains timeless from this text:

- **Head does not have the meaning of chief, leader, or authority over, but of origin and source.**
- Christ, as head, is the honorable origin of the man (as his Creator); the man (Adam), as head, is the honorable origin of the woman (Eve); and God, as head, is the honorable origin of Christ (in his incarnation).
- **Men and women pray and speak prophetically in the worship service.**
- Everyone honors their honorable head as the source and origin of their existence, especially in an honor-shame culture. *Shame and dishonor are not related to God, but to culture.*
- **The difference between man and woman is to remain recognizable.**
- *Man and woman depend on each other;* they complement each other without a hierarchy or a difference in worth and rank.
- **God's glory and honor stand in the foreground. Nothing in the worship service is to distract attention from God.**
- Paul sums up this topic of the sexes in one sentence that captures their equal rank, as it also applies in the assembled church, in the worship service:
- *For just as the woman is from the man, so also the man is through the woman; but all things are from God.* [1 Cor 11:12]

This complex passage naturally contains much more than just this one verse 10 (or 12), which stands exactly in the middle of the passage.

That is why, as with 1 Tim 2, there now follows my explanatory *rendering of the whole passage*, as I would explain it in brief:

It is important to me that you Corinthians make yourselves aware that the origin, that is, the head of every man, is Christ, the Messiah. Through him Adam was created, and with him all men. And as men you belong to him.

The head of the woman is the man. From his side Eve was formed, to become a unity with him. He the head, she the body. The man is her origin, and she too belongs to him, as his wife, for help and complement.

We see this relationship in Christ too. His head is God. He begot him when he became a human being, his Son, who is equal to him.

If a man in Corinth prays aloud or speaks prophetically in the assembly and has his head covered, that is dishonorable. He gives honor to himself, not to Christ, his head. For idol worshipers cover their heads when they sacrifice to idols. Uncovered, the man shows humility and gives honor to the invisible Christ.

With the women it is the other way round. Women who pray and speak prophetically in the assembly and do not cover themselves bring shame on their head. They dishonor themselves and their husband, that is, their head. For with their hair loose they draw attention to themselves instead of to God and Christ.

If anyone demands that the women need not cover themselves, he is not thinking it through to the end. For you know, after all, that an uncovered woman in Corinth counts as one who has been shorn and is like a woman who prostitutes herself or is out for a sexual encounter. If she does not veil or cover herself in public, then logically she should also cut off her hair or have it shaved off completely.

I know that this is not what you want to achieve with your demand! But in the society in which you live, that would be the consequence! So do not risk becoming a stumbling block for people who come to you and see how the usual custom of covering in public is rejected among you.

The men are not to veil themselves in the worship service, in God's presence. For the man is the image of God and the reflection of his glory. The woman is God's image too, but beyond that she is also the reflection of the glory of the man. Her beauty is that of her husband, from whom she was created and with whom she is one.

How could she become his glory? Certainly not because he was created from her, but because she was formed from him, from his side. And she is not the glory of the man because he was created for her sake, but the other way round. She was created for his sake, because he was alone and needed help.

Therefore, because the woman has such worth and is such a great blessing for the man, she is to decide for herself and have control over her head, whether to cover it. No one may prescribe this to her. Neither her husband nor the leaders of the church may prescribe to her that she wear no head covering (or that she wear one). One day she will even judge angels – then she will surely be able, and allowed, to decide in this matter.

Yet the woman, in her independence and freedom of decision, is to bear in mind that she is not independent of her husband. She does not exist without the man, and neither does the man exist without the woman. God's idea was always the togetherness and companionship of man and woman. In the unity of head and body they act together, in agreement, submitting to each other, complementing each other.

What does it mean that the one does not exist without the other? Remember once more the creation of the first human couple. In the beginning the woman came from the man. From his side. She was brought to him, to be one flesh with him again. But think further: every man since then comes from a woman. Without the man there would be no woman, and without the woman there would be no man. Both are of equal dignity, equal worth, and equal standing, the perfect complement in their difference. All this was God's idea. He is the head from whom all this has come forth.

In view of this I ask you: is it proper for a woman to pray to God in public, but unveiled and uncovered? No, you will agree, it is not, in view of the customs in Corinth and in the Roman Empire. There are, after all, customs and practices that are like laws of nature for people. If a man, contrary to the usual custom, wears long hair, it is regarded as a disgrace. Here too, with women it is exactly the other way round. The long hair of women is their glory, their natural adornment, which is perceived as such. Long hair is given to her like an adorning veil or mantle, so that she may be the glory of the man.

This adornment, which seems so desirable to men, she is to cover in the assembly. This is not the place to stand out with this glory, just as the man is to demonstrate his humility with an uncovered head. For it is about the honor and glory of God and of Christ.

If anyone in Corinth wants to argue about this and calls this custom of head covering into question, he should make himself aware that this is the case nowhere. As you want to prescribe to the women that they wear no head covering. No church practices such a thing, so keep to what usually applies to head covering, what is honorable and gives no offense to anyone.

13 The Husband as Head – One-Sided Submission?

No fewer than seven times Paul and Peter address wives, telling them to submit to their husbands, even when these are not believers and do not behave lovingly. At that time it was completely normal and nothing new that women had to behave like this. The husband was the master of the house. He ruled, and everyone was subject to him: wife (or wives), children, slaves, and other members of the household. The great philosopher Aristotle had ordered the household of antiquity in this way, from the top down, with a clear hierarchy. That is how it was lived; that is how it gave the empire and ancient society stability and order. Deviations from it were not tolerated. *That was not the biblical ideal, for the ideal describes man and woman as partners of equal standing, without hierarchy. But this is how it had turned out, as had been foreseen after the Fall (Gen 3:16).* It is precisely this social structure that the gospel encounters throughout the Roman Empire.

Why is submission so strongly emphasized, and does it still apply in the same way today? Many women experienced their role as hard to bear and without a way out. They came to terms with it as far as possible. They were usually much younger than their husbands; they were his possession, had no voice, hardly any freedoms, and no rights. There was no such thing as marrying for love! Submission was more burden and compulsion than joy. *Now, as people who confess Jesus, they have come into a living relationship with Jesus Christ. They now live with him and can learn to be subject to their husbands from the heart, as to the Lord.* The freedom the gospel had brought them, and the dignity it had given back to them as women, did not have to become a reason to rebel against their husbands. The apostles put great emphasis on the gospel not being brought into disrepute in the society of that time through such behavior.

In this ancient world, husbands as masters of the house appear as the head of the wife. As already said, this is not the biblical ideal, but the reality of life, which is not evaluated any further. But it is redefined. *For nowhere in the New Testament are men commanded to govern well or to rule wisely. Under the example of the*

Lord Jesus Christ, being head is given a new definition (Eph 5:21-33): the head, that is, the husband, is to love his wife as himself, love her to the point of self-sacrifice. He is to provide for her and care for her.

When these words were read aloud to the assembled house church, every member of the ancient household was addressed directly. That alone was unusual. But not only that, for what Paul demanded of the men was revolutionary. Such behavior of husband and wife toward each other, toward children and slaves, turned the patriarchal structure of the household into a kind of patriarchy of love. And so the relationship of man and woman began to move closer to what God intended at the beginning. Without attacking the social structures of that time. That would have done the gospel the greatest possible harm. These firm structures of the fallen world are undermined, softened, and changed by the love of Christ.

The same applied to the converted slaves. They were to submit to their masters. Today no one would come up with the idea of justifying slavery with these words of the apostles. Yet Christians did that too, right into the 19th century. In antiquity slavery was a firm and existential part of society. For us today it is no longer imaginable. Slavery was never God's will – it is contemptuous of human beings. Nevertheless, the converted slave is now called upon to serve from the heart, as if he were serving the Lord. In the same way the masters are called upon to behave kindly toward their slaves, all the more so because many of them were now their brothers. In Christ there were now no longer free and slave.

That the apostles addressed the order of the ancient household in this constellation (husband, wife, children, slaves) makes clear that these instructions were written not to us, but for us. The difference is that our social structure today no longer knows slavery, nor the ancient household with its *pater familias*, that is, the ruling father of the house. Man and woman have equal rights by law. And for that we can only be grateful. Today there are many shared households, many single-person households and retirement homes, which did not exist back then, and so there are no corresponding instructions from the apostles either.

Paul makes clear that it is not the *pater familias* who is the ruler of the house, but Christ who is Lord over all. All are first of all accountable to this heavenly Lord.

So what do we do with these instructions?

A widespread view is that the submission of the woman is anchored in the creation order. But the only good order is the one before the Fall. Without hierarchy, without the man being head, and without one-sided submission of the woman. Only after the Fall did the disorder arise in which the man rules over the woman unlawfully and without a mandate. I am not saying that this was always and in principle bad, but no one would wish it back, any more than slavery. So we really must understand these words of the Bible against their historical background, too.

This does not mean, as one might quickly conclude, that God's word is no longer taken seriously. On the contrary, if these instructions about submission and love are lived out in this way, that corresponds to the divine ideal. But there is a better way, which Paul and Peter themselves propose. Paul speaks of *mutual submission* (Eph 5:21) and then cites the marriage relationship as an example of where it is put into practice. **Indeed, the wife too should love her husband, although this is required only once in the New Testament. And in the same way the husband should submit to his wife. That is what Peter says with "likewise, you husbands" when in 3:7 he refers back to 3:1, where he calls on the wives to submit. Furthermore, he says that all of us are to be firmly clothed with humility toward one another (1 Pet 5:5).**

Marriage today cannot be lived as in antiquity. Some try it in a weakened form. **But if submission is grounded in a misunderstood creation order, that is not biblical, not even when it works well**. Christian submission (that is, submission between fellow believers, including believing husbands and wives) is not slavish and dishonoring. It is humble, loyal, and loving deference, cooperation, and support. Like humility and gentleness, submission should be a normal Christian trait of character. And ideally it should be mutual.

I had this impression of myself, and I have also noticed it in other men: that we accept such calls to one-sided submission without any emotion. After all, it is women who are affected and not men. We understand them the way we were taught and the way we ourselves have been socialized in our churches and in part also in society. Sadly, it shows the inclination of our hearts.

Why do we not sit up and take notice when, at first sight, women are being restricted, and ask how the relevant Bible passages must be understood? We more easily accept something that we would question if it applied to us. Let us allow our hearts to be changed and go to school with Jesus and with Paul.

14 Neither Male nor Female

Galatians 3:28 is often cited when it comes to gender roles:

> [Gal 3:26-28] *for you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*
>
> *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is not male and female (neither what is male nor what is female); for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

I often hear that Paul is speaking here about salvation, which is open without distinction to all the national and religious groups listed here and, finally, to both sexes. It is about being in Christ, they say, but not about our real life in the fallen creation. There these differences would still exist.

But what does Paul take up right at the beginning of the letter? Peter and the Jews separated themselves from those from the nations, in order to recline at separate tables. That was the problem addressed by Gal 3:28. So it was an entirely practical church problem that this verse aims to resolve.

It is true, we remain what we are, but something is added for all that is greater than what we are by race, class, or sex: sonship. Paul is speaking of the ancient status of sonship. It included privileges and dignity, rights and inheritance. That did not apply to daughters. *He grants sonship of God to believers, to men and women alike!*

In Judaism, salvation, and what was understood by it in the Old Covenant, was already accessible to the groups named here. The Greek was received as a proselyte, provided he was circumcised. There were free and slaves, as there were men and women, in the people of Israel. *Paul would not be saying very much that was new. This explanation in terms of salvation is not wrong, but it is not everything.*

It is about more, namely a view of humanity. At its core this verse 28 says that all people are God's image, all have the same dignity, and as sinners all have the same problem: they need Christ, and they receive Christ. The three pairs could

be continued: old and young, poor and rich, strong and weak, children and parents, people with and without disabilities, the ritually clean and unclean. For the Galatians, understandably, what comes first is that Jews and the nations are now all equal and all one in the family of the Messiah. All are sons of God. In the church we meet everyone as a son of God. All other differences that still exist move into the background and no longer determine how we act and speak with one another.

Paul names these three groupings because in the unredeemed world they stand in tension with one another. *In the church these differences must not be a cause of conflict.* The Jews regarded themselves as God's chosen people; they looked down on the nations. Without circumcision these could not belong to God's people. Slaves were a possession that was exploited. They were worth nothing, had no voice and no rights. Women at that time were also a possession and inferior to the man. They too had no voice and few rights. *In Christ we now meet one another as God always intended. Through baptism and faith all become people who confess Christ. All social, ethnic, and hierarchical differences have come to an end in Christ.* In the church there are now only brothers and sisters. There, under God's eyes, these differences may no longer play any role. *If women and men have the same dignity, both can carry out all the ministries that exist in the church. That is a logical conclusion, even if this verse is not about ministries.*

Here Paul takes up the phrase "male and female" from Genesis 1:27. He is not pleading for some kind of gender-neutral existence. In 1 Corinthians 11 he insists that women, when they pray or speak prophetically in the worship service, should appear visibly as women, and that men should be seen as men; Paul may have known of various aspects of pagan cultures and worship practices in which gender was deliberately obscured or even erased, but that is not the point here.

The order of creation and the order of salvation cannot contradict each other. The order of salvation restores the original creation order that God intended. In it, man and woman are of equal rank. The gospel has healing effects. First in the church, that is, among believers. They are positive and revolutionary changes. It is power for salvation

that can dissolve sinful structures thousands of years old and can change and save whole cultures and nations. Ultimately, the abolition of slavery, our democracy, our civil liberties, and the equal rights of the sexes can also be traced back in part to this word of Paul. Over a long time they have unfolded their effect on society. *In the church, with regard to the roles of men and women, we should not lag behind this.*

Although this verse does not speak about these roles, one cannot say that there is no connection whatsoever. *This verse is a foundation on which sisters are free to carry out, without distinction or one-sided submission, any ministry for which they are gifted or equipped.* This does not require a quota system, but humble and wise dealings with one another.

Gal 3:28 must be engraved on our hearts. God does not look at people with prejudice; then neither should we (Rom 2:11; Jas 2:1).

15 Our Confession of Guilt

"Manly brothers" – what is that? In 1 Corinthians 16:13 Paul calls on the sisters and brothers to be manly, to act like men, and to be strong. This is not the opposite of femininity, but of fearful behavior. Here I would like to interpret manly in this way: we men must be manly by daring to speak a long-overdue confession of guilt to our sisters in Christ and to let corresponding actions follow. *We men have claimed for ourselves the authority to interpret, and with it the authority to act, by which we have excluded women from ministries in the church.*

We thought we were doing God a service, yet we brought about the opposite!

God, Yahweh Elohim, Creator of man and woman, forgive us that we have thought, demanded, and acted as if the sisters were not of equal rank but of lower rank. Not a counterpart, but a step below us.

Lord Jesus, forgive us that we thought women had to be silent and hold back in public.

Forgive us that we thought you did not want them to proclaim you and your truth in public.

Dear sisters, forgive us this wrong attitude, which we thought was godly and biblical! Forgive us that in some situations we gave you a bad conscience without any justification.

Forgive us that we discussed and decided important matters and questions without you. We did not ask for your advice!

We men have failed. We were often, and without noticing it, selfish, domineering know-it-alls. Blind about ourselves. Blind about you women and your callings and gifts.

Forgive us where we were cowardly and pushed you to the front and relied on you, where we should have stood our ground like men and gone ahead, and where you rightly expected it of us.

Forgive us our indifference to what was hard for you and what you never understood. We never asked you how you felt about it. Forgive us that we did not ask you how you felt about these discriminatory attitudes and teachings.

We are sorry. We were wrong.

Be free! Serve the Lord with joy!

We will support you – just as you have always supported us, despite everything we have done.

16 In Closing

Many Christians for whom the Bible is the only standard settled the "women's question" long ago and cleared the way for the sisters. In my life this insight sadly came very late. So this book, too, is actually out of step with the times, for it should long since have been clearly recognized that we cannot do without the ministry of the sisters in *all* areas of church life. We men only harm ourselves if we hold on to a hierarchical view of man and woman. But it is never too late to change one's convictions.

The questions dealt with in this book have long since been settled in many places, and I am coming along as a latecomer. The battle was fought long ago. Others have fought on this front over the last 30 years. I have profited very much from their theological work.

Much more far-reaching topics are coming toward the church. Topics that throw the question of gender into massive confusion are on the agenda today and are being brought massively into the awareness of society, such as transsexuality. We as Christians in our society must have answers to this. We Christians must hold high that God's idea of two sexes is brilliant and must be defended. But if we are still talking about whether women may speak and teach in the church, then we will finally lose all relevance, and on the truly current topics we will no longer be taken seriously or heard.

One of these current topics is transhumanism, which defines the human being completely differently from the way the Bible does – and this is about much more than the question of gender. Here another tower of Babel is taking shape before our eyes, which fits the picture of the end times as the Bible describes it to us.

"Let us be Christians who model for this world a loving togetherness of man and woman in marriage, family, and church. Let us be bearers of hope in a confused and disoriented society that is looking for honest, authentic role models.

Let us be examples marked by respect and appreciation toward the other sex. Then, and only then, will the people of today still perceive us and take us seriously at all."

Gabriele Singer

As man and woman

Loving, leading, teaching

Better together!

Better side by side!

Better with one another!



"I see in the word of God that Jesus, conceived by a woman without the involvement of a man, did not silence women, but on the contrary called on them to speak. That he approved of a woman sitting at the feet of the rabbi and learning, as Paul sat at the feet of Gamaliel. And that he let a woman perform an important priestly service on him and received from her his anointing for his burial. Women were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb. 5 of the 7 'words from the cross' are witnessed and handed down only by women (Roman soldiers excepted), and the most important milestones of salvation history were witnessed by women alone. Jesus deliberately met the

women after his resurrection and gave them the task of telling his brothers that he had risen. What more could he have done to make it clear once and for all that the complete equality of women in the redeemed church is God's original and unchangeable intention?" Christian Beese

Like an incurable disease, like ancient weeds, firmly and deeply rooted and spreading everywhere, the view of women held by Christian men has from the beginning been an echo of their surroundings and, sadly, also of their hearts. Lived out consciously and unconsciously, in crass, in moderate, even in loving ways, there is nevertheless no other option than turning back to the biblical and thus divine truth, which alone sets free.

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf

"It is not an easy path to move from a patriarchal to a woman-friendly way of thinking. It requires that we reimagine everything we thought we understood about our world and how it works, about our faith and our relationship to God, to one another, and to our cosmos. It is just as difficult a shift as it was for our ancestors to move from an earth-centered to a sun-centered understanding of the universe. The first scientists who proposed that the earth revolves around the sun, and not the other way round, were excommunicated, because it was believed that this posed a threat to God's power. In a similar way it is very difficult to break free from a patriarchal worldview in which it is accepted as normal that women are led and dominated by men and that systems and institutions are organized and run by men. An equal-rights, egalitarian worldview is a worldview that sees women and men in mutual relationship, sharing power, recognizing, fostering, and releasing each other's gifts. And meeting one another with equal respect and equal dignity." Barbara Reid

"Whoever has been gripped by the spirit of the gospel will agree that a patriarchal understanding of roles, which treats women as minors and paralyzes them for the kingdom of God, is not only an injustice, but has brought untold harm to the church of God. Even if this never happened out of ignoble motives, in the spirit of a power struggle or even of intended humiliation, but often enough because of a tragic misunderstanding of Holy Scripture, it is now

nevertheless time to question demeaning traditions courageously and to turn away from them, so that women too can set their feet 'in a broad place' and at last gratefully experience the complete redemption won by Jesus Christ." Hartmut Krüger

Ignoring the cultural background of the biblical texts does not lead to keeping to the wording of the texts; rather, the biblical wording often, if not mostly, becomes a projection screen for one's own cultural convictions of one's own present. What was proclaimed to many evangelicals as an eternal biblical truth is in truth a product of the 19th and 20th centuries. So to stand up for the equal rights of women in the ministry of the church does not follow today's current spirit of the age of feminism, for that has long since been about far more sweeping demands. It is about reversing the roles as they existed up to the 20th century, or about dissolving gender altogether. How is anyone to learn even to carry on a serious discussion of different positions on disputed questions, when for decades one has practiced, and fought for, imposing dogmatic confessions or convictions?

Thorsten Dietz

17 Other Books by the Author

These books have been published in German.

Und die Toten leben doch (And Yet the Dead Live), Bielefeld, 1992

Seitenwechsel – Von Adam zu Christus (Changing Sides – From Adam to Christ), Bielefeld, 2011

Entrückung, Himmel, Ewigkeit – Ein neuer Blick auf alte Themen (Rapture – Heaven – Eternity – A New Look at Old Themes), Nürnberg, 2015

Gottes Lamm, Golgota und die Ewigkeit (The Lamb of God – Golgotha and Eternity), Wuppertal, 2015

Fantastische Himmelwelt, Lehre und Leben der Himmelwelt im Epheserbrief (Fantastic Heavenly World – The Teaching and Life of the Heavenly World in Ephesians), Nürnberg, 2016

Gott spricht, Eine erklärende Übertragung der allgemeinen Briefe und der Offenbarung (God Speaks – An Explanatory Rendering of the General Letters and Revelation), Sulzberg, 2017

Epheser, nacherzählt, erklärt für heute (The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians – Paraphrased, Explained, for Today), Sulzberg, 2018

Gods good Gospel, Gottes gutes Evangelium (God's Good Gospel), Sulzberg, 2019

Markus, nacherzählt, erklärt für heute (The Gospel according to Mark – Paraphrased, Explained, for Today), Sulzberg, 2019

Galater, nacherzählt, erklärt für heute (The Letter of Paul to the Galatians – Paraphrased, Explained, for Today), Sulzberg, 2020

Die Briefe des Johannes, nacherzählt, erklärt für heute (The Letters of John – Paraphrased, Explained, for Today), Sulzberg, 2020

Frauen, vergebt uns! – Die Rolle von Frau und Mann (Women, Forgive Us! – On the Role of Woman and Man), Sulzberg, 2020

Ein König voller Pracht – Die gute Botschaft von Jesus, dem Messias (A King Full of Splendor – The Good News of Jesus, the Messiah), Augsburg, 2022